

2 November 1954

TO: Chief, Management Staff  
SUBJECT: Survey of Signal Center Cable Reference Service

1. PROBLEMS:

- a. Determine whether cables are vital materials, and, if necessary, establish procedure to provide for vital materials protection of current cable traffic. (Present measures provide protection for cables over six months old).
- b. Determine the reference and copy retention requirements for copies of cables maintained by this office and provide for proper maintenance and disposition of all copies.
- c. Simplify, improve or eliminate cable microfilming operations in accordance with needs established under items (a) and (b) above.
- d. Recommend any improvements in procedures, forms and equipment which become evident in the course of the survey.

2. ASSUMPTIONS:

- a. It is assumed that a numerical file of cables is necessary to serve the long term cable reference requirements of the Agency.
- b. It is also assumed that the responsibility for providing such service is a proper function of the Office of Communications.

These assumptions are made because it would be necessary to carry this survey to other offices to determine otherwise.

3. FACTS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM:

- a. The Signal Center is maintaining, on a permanent basis, a numerical reference file of all incoming, outgoing and lateral cables. These include cables which originated under COI, OSS, SSU and CIG as well as CIA.
- b. The average number of requests for cable reference per month is approximately 145. Each request calls for reference to an average of 3 cables. (See attached Appendix A).
- c. Upwards of 50% of all reference requests are made by RI. Approximately 6% are made by SSD. The remainder, except for about 1%, are made by other ID/P offices. (See attached Appendix A).

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- d. 80% of all cables requested are dated prior to 1951. 67% of all cables requested fall within the years 1948, 1949 and 1950. The percentages for those years are respectively 20%, 20% and 27%. (See attached Appendix A).
- e. In 1951 RI began maintaining on a permanent basis, copies of all cables to and from DD/P offices, except for a few bearing sensitive indicators.
- f. According to RI personnel, practically all requests of DD/P offices for cables dated subsequent to 1950 are made to RI. Only when the cable is not available in RI is the request referred to the Signal Center. Non-availability, in most instances, is due to the cable being charged out to another requestor.
- g. The Signal Center cable file is not used for servicing reference requests before the cables are 6 months old. Reference during the first 6 months is made to other copies, i.e., action or information copies or those maintained in a chronological file by RI.
- h. All cables dated through July 1953 have been microfilmed. After being filmed, those dated through 1952 were destroyed. Those dated from 1 January 1953 through July 1953 are awaiting destruction.
- i. Duplicate reels of all microfilmed cables have been deposited [redacted] for vital document protection. No cables dated later than July 1953 have been afforded vital document protection.
- j. Authority for the destruction of microfilmed cables was granted by the National Archives with the provision that the microfilm meet minimum standards as prescribed by the National Archives and the Bureau of Standards for permanent record retention.
- k. The great increase in cable traffic in recent years has imposed too large a load on the existing system for numbering in and out cables, resulting in an unfavorable effect on reference efficiency.

4. DISCUSSION:

It is evident from the facts presented above that there is continued reference to cables regardless of their age. Most reference to older cables is for the purpose of obtaining data on personalities. Case officers and SISD personnel are continually digging up old data on persons in whom they have a current interest. Since the collection of information on certain individuals and the storing of such information for possible future use is a significant aspect of the substantive function of the Agency, there is no doubt that the cables in which this information is stored are vital documents.

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Many other cables containing valuable project data would also be considered vital if, in an emergency, the record copy which is normally maintained by the action office were destroyed. As far as the analyst was able to determine, most cables contain either project or personality data, both of which might be needed in an emergency. Therefore, vital document protection should be afforded to a complete set of incoming and outgoing cables. Perhaps a small percentage of cables would not require vital document protection, but the cost of segregating them would amount to more than the small extra cost of maintaining all.

Obviously, vital document protection should be provided as promptly upon receipt or dispatch of cables as practicable. Under the present procedure of depositing microfilms of cables for vital document protection, current cable traffic is not protected because it is not practical to microfilm less than a 6 months' accumulation of cables. To film less than a 6 months' accumulation would necessitate the preparation of a voluminous index which would nullify most of the benefits usually expected from microfilming. Therefore, if current cable traffic is to be accorded vital material protection, such protection must be accomplished through the use of hard copy. An extra ditto copy could be run off at the time of initial distribution for this purpose.

Insofar as the cable reference service provided by the Signal Center is concerned, some of the facts obtained indicate that practically all reference to cables dating after 1950 might probably be served by the file maintained by RI. In such an event, reference to older cables would still have to be served by the Signal Center file as they are not available in RI. Although the evidence seems to point to a need for change in the present cable reference service for reasons of economy, it would be impossible to make specific recommendations without first obtaining more details as to how the RI file is maintained and indexed, and what the reference requirements of users are.

An examination of the cable microfilming operation revealed that some of the films being produced barely meet the minimum acceptable standards prescribed by the National Archives for permanent record retention. This deficiency is attributable to a defective camera and also indirectly to faulty processing. It is in no way the fault of the Signal Center camera personnel who are performing their filming and film reference functions with competence and skill. They were quick to point out to the analyst the defective images which they had been getting lately, explaining that they thought it was caused by poor processing. It was quite natural for them to think that poor processing was the cause since a lot of processing difficulty had been experienced in the past. The analyst recognized that most of the defects were caused by a defective camera and took necessary action to have the camera repaired.

The camera now in use produces duplicate rolls of film simultaneously; one roll being for reference use at the Signal Center and the other roll for vital document deposit. This camera, which has a reduction ratio of 17 to 1, produces a microfilm image approximately 25% larger than is usually made of similar records. The larger image is desired because anything smaller would be hard to read on the present reader. However, if the 17 to 1 camera were replaced by a 24 to 1 camera and the present reader were replaced by a reader of higher magnification, the same results could be obtained with a savings of almost 25% in film consumption. There would be other advantages too, in that the 24 to 1 camera is available in a later model which would be less susceptible to breakdowns and a new reader would have better illumination than the present model.

The present camera was procured on a rental basis. A new camera could also be rented at the same rate. A new reader, however, would have to be purchased at a cost of \$875. In view of the large amount of reference made to microfilmed cables, it is felt that this cost could quickly be recovered through time saved in locating and abstracting cables. The money saved on film and film processing would, of course, be an added incentive for procuring a new reader.

In and out numbers are assigned respectively to all cables received and transmitted by the Signal Center to facilitate logging and reference control. In-cables are assigned consecutive numbers from 1 to 49,999 while out-cables are assigned numbers from 50,000 to 99,999. When a block of numbers has been exhausted, the same block is started over for succeeding cables. During the past year a block of numbers has been lasting for a little less than 6 months.

This numbering system was designed several years ago when cable traffic was much lighter than it is today. Now, the use of the same two blocks of numbers over and over again with no symbol to denote dates creates a degree of confusion when a cable is asked for by its in or out number and the date is not known. Because any given in or out number may have been assigned to as many as a dozen separate cables over the past 5 years, it is sometimes necessary to check several cables in order to find the right one. This confusion could easily be eliminated by providing larger blocks of numbers to cover a whole year's traffic and by prefixing the serial number with a symbol to denote the year. For example, the first in-cable for 1955 would be identified as 15-1. If the total number of cables received in 1955 was 109,143, then the last one would be identified as 15-109143. Assuming that a block of numbers from 200,000 to 400,000 were to be designated for out-cable numbering, the first out-cable for 1955 would be 05-200000. Succeeding cables would be numbered 05-200001, 05-200002, etc.

5. ACTION RECOMMENDED:

a. With respect to providing vital document protection for current cable traffic, the following recommendations are made:

- (1) At the time of initial cable distribution, run off an extra copy of each incoming and outgoing cable for vital document storage.
- (2) Make daily deposits at [ ] of the previous day's traffic.
- (3) Arrange each day's deposit in numerical sequence by in or out number and provide a copy of all pertinent log sheets to accompany each deposit to facilitate reference.
- (4) Observe as a minimum the security precautions as outlined in Appendix B for the protection of cables while in transit from Headquarters to the Repository.
- (5) Continue the deposit of microfilm copy every 6 to 8 months. When the film is deposited, destroy the hard copy.
- (6) Set 1 January 1955 as the target date for implementing these recommendations. On or shortly after that date, a daily run is being established between Headquarters and the new Records Center. A panel truck with a driver and an armed courier will be used on the run. By using this service, there would be no need to increase the Office of Communications' T/O strength by two for this purpose.

b. It seems apparent that appreciable savings of labor and equipment could be realized by consolidating the long term cable reference services provided by the Signal Center and RI and perhaps other offices. Therefore, it is recommended that a more comprehensive survey be made of the Agency's reference and copy retention requirements for cables to determine whether consolidation would be practical. Such survey, if approved, would be conducted by the Records Management Division of the Management Staff and would cover RI, DD/P Area Divisions, SED and other selected offices as well as additional study in the Signal Center.

c. It is recommended that a new microfilm reader and a new camera be procured to replace the present reader and camera. This would result in better quality film and faster reference service. A Model 9202 Diebold Reader and a 24X Commercial Model Recordak Camera would best suit the needs of the Signal Center microfilming operation.

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d. It is recommended that the present system of serially numbering in and out cables be modified to the extent that each cable, regardless of date of origin, would bear a distinctive identifying number. It is suggested that the system described in the last paragraph of item 4 above be given consideration since it would not require extensive changes in the present numbering machines. In regard to numbering machines, it is further suggested that a new electric numbering machine, manufactured by Robertie and distributed by the Charles G. Stott Company, be investigated as a possible replacement for the manual machines now in use.

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Chief, Records Management Division

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APPENDICES:

Appendix A - Cable Reference Loads  
Appendix B - Security Requirements